A sked why she cares so much about issues such as social and environmental justice and the needs of poor communities, Rebecca Morton quickly replied, “I don’t think you can live without giving.”

Expressions like “giving back,” “fostering understanding” and “peace” peppered the conversation of this cultural anthropology major as she summed up the experiences she gained working two co-ops: for San Francisco-based human rights organization Global Exchange, and for Northeastern University’s Center of Community Service.

With both, Morton came away feeling “fueled up” for a life spent in service to others.

“One of the larger themes in my life is focused on giving back. By working with the community, and trying to help people, I gain a chance to better understand others, and this fosters a better understanding of myself,” she said. “When we start to understand ourselves, and examine the needs of one another, I think it helps broaden our perspective of humanity. This helps us see that we’re not all that different from one another.”

As an organizer of the Week of Justice on Northeastern’s campus recently, she looked at issues of fair trade and worker abuse through the eyes of activist and guest speaker Chie Abad. As a staffer for San Francisco-based Global Exchange, she pondered issues related to peace and conflict, and social and environmental justice by connecting expert speakers with audiences and venues.

“I really like working on bringing people together,” she said.

Her work in San Francisco opened her eyes to the powerful role an organization like Global Exchange can play in disseminating information and messaging, and it was a natural segue for her to take those lessons and translate them into work for the Center of Community Service, she said.

“I came back from my experience at Global Exchange just fueled up for what I wanted to do, and things I wanted to change,” she said.

Morton worked on the MLK Service Day; the annual Volunteer Fair; and Alternative Spring Break, among other events. Additionally, she designed and implemented a database to help better organize the center, and also helped produce a newsletter for students and a regular Focus Forum, dealing with issues facing the community.

The recipient of the College of Arts and Sciences’ 21st Century Scholarship, Morton recently traveled to Tanzania to work with elementary schoolchildren ages 2 to 5.

“I was always drawn to that country because it is one of the poorest in Africa,” she said. Through games and singing exercises, Morton helped expose the children to English, and assisted in general teaching. “I loved making the kids smile and laugh. I felt as though if I could do that, it was a good enough reason to be there,” she said.

Her interest in cultural anthropology also found her in Arkansas in a rainy, snowy season, helping in the construction of four Habitat for Humanity homes.

“The students I worked on that project with have become like a family,” she said. “We worked in the rain and the snow to dig foundations and install flooring in the March Alternative Spring Break. It was an amazing experience.”

All her experiences have helped her gain a perspective she wished more people had. “So many of us tend to stay in our little bubbles of comfort,” she said, “but so much good can happen if we just step out of that bubble for a moment, and start to consider the perspective of the larger world.”